

A YEAR AGO CiB LAUNCHED ITS FOUNDATION LEVEL DIPLOMA IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION. THE FIRST STUDENTS HAVE NOW COMPLETED THE SIX-MONTH PROGRAMME AND AROUND 50 OTHERS ARE EITHER ABOUT TO SET OUT OR ARE ALREADY ON COURSE. JACKIE DAVIS TALKED TO SOME OF THOSE INVOLVED

CiB DIPLOMA



The First Year Verdict

The Bosses

JULIE BERRY, employee communications manager, Sellafield Ltd. Three of her team of five joined the first cohort.

"Each of the three had a reasonable understanding of employee communications, although I am not sure they realised how much they did know. The diploma has really helped them build their confidence and hone their skills.

"They have been able to take the learning from the programme and apply it to their everyday working environment.

"The only downside, if there was one, was that the three of them were away from the office at the same time for some of the programme.

"During the diploma CiB also ran a support module on proof reading at our company attended by the three from my team and others from the overall cohort. As a company we were also able to have other colleagues from our wider communications team attend the course and experience the excellent training that CiB provides. I would encourage any individual to undertake the diploma."



Department of two: Lynda and Tatiana

LYNDA O'HARE, internal communications manager, Nottingham Trent University. She works in a department of two and found it worthwhile, despite difficulties managing the workload while her colleague juggled coursework with the day-to-day job.

"The programme has been extremely useful and has helped Tatiana to focus on the bigger picture, in particular the reasons why we do certain activities. This is giving her more of a strategic edge, which can otherwise be difficult to develop in a non-managerial post.

"Producing her evidence file has clearly demonstrated the range of work she is involved with and helped her to evaluate how different channels work. The day-to-day need



It's been a busy launch year for CiB's foundation diploma: eight people are already through, another four have completed their exams and dozens more have either begun the programme or signed up to start.

CiB education and accreditation director Sheila Parry is delighted with the way it has started.

"This is the first step in a programme to raise industry standards and provide a recognised professional qualification structure for internal communicators," she says. "It fills an acute gap in the internal communication sector and there's more to come.

"The foundation level encompasses a robust set of key skills that are truly fundamental to an IC career. The programme has had tremendous take-up in an otherwise challenging financial year.

"Feedback from the people who have already completed the programme has been incredibly positive, with many of them saying they feel so much more confident in the work they are doing – and we are listening to them carefully

in order to refine and improve our offering.

"It's not only private industry that's welcomed the programme – Government communicators have also bought into it in a big way. One Government department alone is signing up around 30 people and we have had both public and private sector organizations putting whole communications teams through the process.

"The internal communication industry has needed something like this for years and now the success is there for all to see."

But what about the participants, their bosses and the CiB members who have volunteered their services as examiners and mentors? We asked them for their honest views.

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to get on with the job doesn't always allow us the luxury of reflecting on our practice.

"The programme was very time-consuming and at times difficult for Tati to juggle with her work commitments. This would be my biggest criticism. We are a team of two and are unable to share the workload any wider. I suspect that in these credit crunch times, a lot of other organizations will struggle too. Expecting the coursework to be done during the working day is, therefore, unrealistic for teams such as ours.

"Overall, though, we are very excited about the programme and the programmes that will follow soon as they are so vital to the professionalization of our business."

in the numbers

59 The number of people who have signed up to take the foundation level diploma in the programme's first year

30 The number of senior CiB people who currently make up the independent monitoring panel to assess the students

14 The number of CiB members currently engaged as mentors on the foundation level programme

5 The number of cohorts that have run during 2009

2 The number of cohorts already fully subscribed for 2010

CLAIRE FAWCETT, communication coordinator, Sellafield Ltd, Cumbria. "I really enjoyed the programme; it was really useful and has given me a lot more confidence in doing my job. I found it quite hard going and time-consuming. However, I did enjoy gathering information for my evidence folder. I will use this as a reference tool. I was also very happy with my CiB mentor."

TATIANA DE ARAUJO ALVES WOOLLEY, internal comms coordinator, Nottingham Trent University. "It was very enjoyable. I learnt a great deal and managed to develop some areas that I don't often get to work on in my current job. I saw the col-

The students

lection of the evidence not as a problem but as affirmation of the broad experience I have gained from my job and work I have done outside my area."

TRACY SIMPSON, internal communicator, RBS Invoice Finance. "I found the programme really helped me to channel my knowledge. The way the evidence file was structured made it very clear what was expected and enabled me to think about what it is I have done and am doing on a day-to-day basis!

"Planning a whole communications project was very interesting and a useful learning experience as it felt like a true-to-life example of

what is expected of us as internal communicators. One of the areas that I think can be improved is that there isn't any actual teaching. For me it would have been useful to have some 'best practice' examples on how to do things."

MICHELLE WATKINSON, comms associate, BAE Systems, Barrow-in-Furness. "I found the cohort extremely well structured and organized. The formation of the overall diploma and examination was well put together and thought through. However, I have concerns around the crossover between journalism and internal communications. I felt the programme was very journalism-led."

The Mentors

RACHEL ALLEN, head of communication, London Underground Rail Operations. "I'm proud to be part of the CiB accreditation programme and think the mentoring arrangement is a good one that not only benefits the students but the mentors as well. I think it's important that we constantly strive to raise the standards of professional communicators for the benefit of every company that has the foresight to hire them and for our industry."

PETER MULLER, consultant, Middlesex. "Although new to internal communications my 'student' is not at all fazed by the course work, and is beginning to show natural ability on the various core skills. She is enthusiastic, focused and determined to succeed. Much of her enthusiasm towards the work is because of the excellent preparatory information she received prior to the programme.

"From a personal point, being a mentor has given me a buzz. I've found it highly satisfying as it's allowed me to pass on my knowledge of the industry to others. If asked to mentor again, then the answer would be a resounding yes."



The pathfinders: the first group of eight to take CiB's foundation level accreditation

DECLAN LYONS, managing director, BCT Communications Ltd, Dublin. "I've been fortunate to have acted as an examiner on a range of certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate courses over the years. As such, I've come to expect great variety in the standard that presenting candidates achieve in these. I was very pleasantly surprised at the consistent high quality of the candidates we met at the accreditation meeting. They demonstrated a genuine depth and breadth of knowledge of internal communications. I was especially impressed by the way that they applied theory to the practical challenges that they faced in their organizations. This is the real value of the CiB programme. Participants get the opportunity to explore current ways of working and test them against



industry best practice. I believe that the programme will establish itself quickly as the qualification for those starting out in internal communications. The programme designers and organizers deserve a vote of thanks from the entire professional internal communications community."

GAVIN GREIG, corporate social responsibility programme manager, Student Loans Company Ltd, West Lothian. "I cannot emphasise enough just how important the interview stage is in the accreditation process. We wouldn't hire someone for our own organizations on the basis of their paper qualifications alone. CiB is telling the outside world that these people have reached the high standards we expect from our members and we need to be sure that they are going to be able to demonstrate that to their current and future employers. If the first cohort was anything to go by, I think the future of our industry and professional body is in safe hands. The standard set by this first group was exceptionally high. They all displayed confidence, enthusiasm and a real grasp of what internal communications is about. They reflected very well on their organizations and I was very impressed."



The Examiners